

2 Samuel 3:22-4:12
August 27, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever had someone who worked under you, who took matters into their own hands because they disapproved of a decision you made? Or maybe you observed that in your work situation or family? If yes, how did you feel toward the subordinate who took matters into their own hands? [Let people engage]

Transition: We are getting ready to read about subordinates who took matters into their own hands – from both camps of Israel and Judah. In fact, we have a story of two homicides! Let me provide a refresher from last week. We learned that David and Abner ended the war between Israel and Judah, and Abner had been getting bolder and bolder, always being the real power or mover and shaker behind the scenes. Abner had approached David with the offer to make him king, claiming to be “in charge” and that “the land was really his.” If David would make a covenant with Abner, Abner would handle the rest. He promised to bring all Israel over to David and met with the leaders of both sides. There was an agreement in principle that simply needed to be finalized.

Instead of moving forward with this agreement, our storyline opens with an account of Abner's murder by Joab, and David's deep resentment of it. Abner's “untimely” death brought their agreement to a screeching halt. What Abner promised David that he'd do, and what looked like he almost completed, was suddenly interrupted by his death. Let's see how the rest of the story plays out.

BOOK:

Joab Murders Abner

²² Just then David's men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. ²³ When Joab and all the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace.

²⁴ So Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! ²⁵ You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.”

²⁶ Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. ²⁷ Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway, as though to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.

²⁸ Later, when David heard about this, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. ²⁹ May his blood fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house! May Joab's house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food.”

³⁰ (Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)

³¹ Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner.” King David himself walked behind the bier.

³² They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner’s tomb. All the people wept also.

³³ The king sang this lament for Abner:

“Should Abner have died as the lawless die?

³⁴ Your hands were not bound,
your feet were not fettered.

You fell as one falls before wicked men.”

And all the people wept over him again.

³⁵ Then they all came and urged David to eat something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets!”

³⁶ All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. ³⁷ So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.

³⁸ Then the king said to his men, “Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? ³⁹ And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!”

Ish-Bosheth Murdered

4 When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became alarmed. ² Now Saul’s son had two men who were leaders of raiding bands. One was named Baanah and the other Recab; they were sons of Rimmon the Beerothite from the tribe of Benjamin—Beeroth is considered part of Benjamin, ³ because the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim and have lived there as aliens to this day.

⁴ (Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.)

⁵ Now Recab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth, and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest. ⁶ They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Recab and his brother Baanah slipped away.

⁷ They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. Taking it with them, they traveled all night by way of the Arabah. ⁸ They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, “Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to take your life. This day the LORD has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring.”

⁹ David answered Recab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, “As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of all trouble, ¹⁰ when a man told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news! ¹¹ How much more—when wicked men have killed an

innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!”

¹²So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner’s tomb at Hebron.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Jesus set forth the teaching that whosoever lives by the sword will die by the sword. The murderers of Ishbosheth did not gain positions of honor with David, but rather they met their deaths.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (2 Sam 3-4). Victor Books.

B. The murder of Abner (chap. 3).

David’s many wives were chosen in direct violation of Deut. 17:15–17. Some students believe that this expression of David’s lust eventually led to the many family problems that plagued his later days. Amnon violated his half-sister Tamar (chap. 13); Absalom rebelled against David and tried to capture the crown (chaps. 13–18); and Adonijah tried to wrest the kingdom from

Solomon (1 Kings 1:5ff). Abner had problems with lust too; for he took one of Saul's concubines and incurred the displeasure of the pretended king. This led to a disruption between Abner and Ishbosheth. Abner tried to make a peaceful agreement with David, but the "sons of Zeruah" plotted against him and killed him (vv. 26–30). While Joab did the actual killing, it is likely that his brother was in on the plans. Joab's hands were stained with blood before his own death came; for he not only killed Abner, but also Absalom (2 Sam. 18:14) and Amasa (2 Sam. 20:10). David asked his son Solomon to deal with Joab, and he did (1 Kings 2:5–6, 28–34). How different history would have been had Abner lived, it is difficult to tell. Certainly Joab held unusual power over David, particularly after he assisted the king in his murderous plot against innocent Uriah (11:14ff). Note, however, David's godly conduct in the matter of Abner's death.

C. The murder of Ishbosheth (chap. 4).

This was the turning point: when Ishbosheth died, the way was wide open for David to rule over the entire nation. However, it must be noted that David did not approve of the method the sons of Rimmon used, and he had the murderers slain because of their crime. David knew that God was able to elevate him to the throne; he would not do evil that good might come from it (Rom. 3:8). These three murders are evidence that David's road to the throne was a bloody one. What a contrast to our Savior who shed His own blood, and not the blood of others, to gain His throne! See 1 Chron. 22:8 for God's evaluation of David's career.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 2 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 459-460) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3:22–39. Particularly incensed was **Joab**. When he found out that **David** had entertained **Abner** at a feast (v. 20) and made overtures of friendship to him (v. 22), he chided **the king**, saying that Abner's purpose was to spy on David (vv. 24–25). **Joab then** took measures to have **Abner** return to Hebron **from the well of Sirah** (site unknown). Pretending to whisper something of importance to **Abner ... Joab** drew **him aside** and viciously assassinated him (**stabbed him in the stomach**, v. 27; cf. 4:5–6). This was in revenge for Abner's murder of Joab's **brother Asahel** (3:27, 30; 2:23). **When David** discovered what had happened, he did not rejoice but rather uttered a curse on **Joab** and his progeny (3:29). Joab's murder of Abner took place in Hebron, a city of refuge (Josh. 21:13), where such revenge was not permitted (Num. 35:22–25). **David** then proclaimed a public **mourning** (2 Sam. 3:31), **buried Abner** in honor at **Hebron** (v. 32), and composed a lamentation (vv. 33–34) in which he spoke of the shameful way in which **Abner** had died. David's compassion and forgiving spirit are evident here, qualities which separated him from ordinary men.

As a sign of his sincerity, **David took** a vow to fast. He also said that he was **weak** compared with Abner. Though he knew that the **sons of Zeruah** (Joab and his brothers) must be punished, he did not know how to undertake it (vv. 35–39). Zeruah was David's half sister (1 Chron. 2:16; cf. 2 Sam. 2:18 and see the chart "David's Family").

D. Death of Ish-Bosheth (chap. 4)

4:1–8. News about Abner's death did not encourage **Ish-Bosheth** to reassert his own authority over **Israel**; on the contrary, it only increased his instability and brought a sense of

panic to the nation (v. 1). Sensing that Ish-Bosheth was powerless, two Benjamite assassins—**Baanah** and **Recab** (vv. 2–3)—gained access to Ish-Bosheth’s **house** at Mahanaim at midday and slew him in his **bed (stabbed him in the stomach, v. 6; cf. the identical means of assassination of Abner by Joab, 3:27), beheaded him (4:7), and carried his head to David at Hebron (v. 8).**

Within the narrative is a reference (v.4) to Jonathan’s son, **Mephibosheth** (otherwise and originally Merib-Baal, 1 Chron. 8:34). The name change is similar to that of Esh-Baal to Ish-Bosheth, but here the change was from “Baal contends” to “from the mouth of shameful.” His lameness occurred when **his nurse**, who was carrying the young **five-year-old** lad out of danger after Jonathan’s death, dropped him and injured him. Mephibosheth reappears later in the story as one in special need of protection (2 Sam. 9). Hence this parenthetical note prepares readers for what follows.

4:9–12. David’s response to this deed, which was done obviously to gain his favor, was identical to his reaction when he learned of Saul’s death (vv. 9–11; cf. 1:11–16). He ordered the two to be executed, their **hands and feet** to be **cut off**, and their corpses to be hanged publicly at **the pool of Hebron (4:12). David** regarded their act as an unjustified assault on a defenseless **man (v. 11)**. No doubt David’s stern measures of retribution also reflected his genuine love for Saul and his family, even though they had opposed him.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 122-123). Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

God Strengthens David (3:1–39). David’s house increased while Ish-Bosheth’s foothold weakened. David possessed many sons, a sign in antiquity of strength and blessing.

As a result of his dispute with Ish-Bosheth, Abner defected to David’s side. Abner had sexual relations with a concubine in the royal harem. Ish-Bosheth interpreted this as a threat to his throne (see 16:21–22; 1 Kgs. 2:22). Abner was so incensed at this charge that he secretly met with David in Hebron. Abner vowed to bring all Israel under David’s rule. David agreed on the condition that Abner return his wife Michal, whom Saul had given to another man (1 Sam. 18:20–27). Abner left under a covenant of peace. When Joab returned to Hebron from battle, he was told of Abner’s arrangement with David. Because of his blood feud with Abner (2:23–24), Joab plotted the assassination of Abner without David’s knowledge.

David was so distraught at Abner’s murder that he took special steps to disassociate himself from the guilt of Joab’s wicked deed. He declared a national day of mourning and personally abstained from food. The people concluded from this that David was innocent; his stature increased in their eyes.

Avenging Saul’s House (4:1–12). The defection of Abner discouraged Ish-Bosheth’s already-dwindling support. Two of his captains, Baanah and Recab, murdered and decapitated the king during his midday’s rest. With the death of Ish-Bosheth, David had no serious rival. Mephibosheth, the only surviving son of Jonathan, suffered from a crippling disability and was not a threat (see chap. 9).

Ish-Bosheth’s assassins presented the king’s head to David as the Lord’s vengeance upon the house of Saul. Although Ish-Bosheth’s death advanced David’s kingdom, he abhorred their treason and executed the murderers.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 2 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 180-181). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Abner's Revolt to David and His Murder (2 Sam. 3:1–39)

The passage—The principal character of this passage is Abner. While David was growing stronger in his claim to leadership of Israel, the house of Saul was growing weaker. It was not Ishbosheth who had the power, but rather Abner. Abner's taking one of Saul's concubines for himself was almost as if he were claiming royal rights for himself.

Abner sent messengers to David. He sought to make a covenant with him. David's condition was that Ishbosheth return Michal, Saul's daughter, who had been given to David as a wife. She seems to have hated David and was living with Paltiel. Abner arranged for the return. He came with some of his leaders to David and promised to unite Israel under his reign. David made a feast for him and sent him away in peace.

Joab, David's military leader, returning from a battle, heard about Abner's feast with David. He was very angry. He accused David of folly and Abner of deception. Joab secretly called for Abner's return, and he murdered him.

Special points—Joab and Abner were strong personal enemies. It may be that David arranged for Joab to be away while he was dealing with Abner. Joab took advantage of David's dependence on him to get his revenge against Abner.

Michal's return to David was probably against her will. Her husband, Paltiel, protested, but only briefly. David did not seek her return in love, but rather as a political move. This shows the low estate of womanhood prior to the coming of Christ.

The Murder of Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 4:1–12)

The passage—Ishbosheth was without a doubt a weakling. Abner had been the strength of his kingdom. When he was murdered, Ishbosheth's courage failed. His subjects were dismayed. Two captains of Ishbosheth's raiding bands, Baanah and Rechab, took advantage of the confusion and chaos. Realizing that David would ultimately win the right to reign over all of Israel, they decided to get a part of the credit for themselves. They murdered Ishbosheth while he was sleeping in his bedchamber. They cut his head off and took it to David in Hebron.

When David saw what they had done he was enraged. They had claimed that they had done the work of God in redeeming David from his enemy. David disagreed. He reminded them that he had slain the Amalekite who had claimed he killed Saul. He said what they had done was worse. He ordered them killed.

Truth for today—Jesus set forth the teaching that whosoever lives by the sword will die by the sword. The murderers of Ishbosheth did not gain positions of honor with David, but rather they met their deaths. Nations of the world would do well to learn this lesson.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 3:22-4:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.